

Book Review

Exposing a Hoax and Rebuilding a Culture: A Review of Wetzel and Hoschouer's *Residential Teaching Communities*

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Since Ralph Wetzel left the academic environment, he has been uncovering a hoax. And now, with the assistance of Ron Hoschouer, he has written *Residential Teaching Communities: Program Development and Staff Training for Developmentally Disabled Persons*, a manual that illuminates serious flaws in our system of residential program development. Together, they described collaborative methods for arranging countercontrolling practices within residential environments that will foster appropriate social interactions. The book seems particularly important in light of Skinner's (1971) assertion that homes for mentally retarded people are noted for allowing only weak countercontrol. Skinner explains that when the control is delegated to others (e.g., paid employees), and that when the ultimate controllers (e.g., taxpayers) do not know what is happening, an agency can be insensitive to the effects of its own practices. Consider this likely scenario:

A group of predominantly professional staff convenes to share their evaluation results and to devise an individual program plan for a person who was recently deinstitutionalized from a large institution to a 10-bed residential facility closer to town. Spirits run high at the meeting. A list of the person's strengths and needs is prepared, and a variety of objectives, teaching strategies, and therapeutic procedures are described. An individualized, clinically sound, and developmentally appropriate individual program plan is prepared. After the meeting, this programmatic prescription is turned over to direct-care staff for implementation. The direct care work-

ers, mostly new employees, have completed a basic in-service on implementing programs and documenting progress; they are eager to execute the plan and contribute to the process of normalization.

Two months later something is very wrong. Nearly 90 objectives are now in place, each with different teaching strategies and documentation requirements. The staff feels overwhelmed and insufficiently trained. A strongly-worded memorandum has mandated strict compliance in carrying out programs and documenting progress, but the programs do not seem to be working. The planned interventions do not correspond with the natural routines or sequences of home living, nor are they coordinated with each other. The staff has found that close adherence to the written procedures ironically interferes with opportunities for incidental and innovative teaching. To make matters worse, there has been a sharp increase in maladaptive behaviors, despite the application of detailed contingency plans to eliminate those behaviors. The professionals who devised the programs are disappointed, but not surprised. In their experience, direct-care residential staff have seldom been able to carry out their programs consistently anyway. Meanwhile, the administrative staff have been preoccupied with an upcoming visit by an accreditation review team, but they are confident that no violations that could jeopardize funding will be cited.

Here is the hoax: In spite of intensive legislative and fiscal efforts to reduce populations of large institutions and monitor service provisions closely, many "deinstitutionalized" people are still under tenacious control of institutional practices. Wetzel and Hoschouer contend that institutions are not so much places as they are forms of organizing and regulating human behavior. They are bureaucratic procedures organized and controlled by ineffective rules and regulations described (often contradictorily) in voluminous policy manuals and management directives. Residential organizational behavior under the control of ineffective rules not only precludes establishment of favorable, normalized en-

Wetzel and Hoschouer's (1984) book is published by Scott, Foresman, and Company. Address correspondence to C. Steve Holburn, Seguin Community Services, 1001 South First Street, Fulton, NY 13069.

vironments, but it also strengthens the competing contingencies that produce isolation and apathy, and it *disintegrates* the community of teachers and learners.

Wetzel and Hoschouer delineate common practices and effects of institutionalized residential organizations, as in the scenario above, but they do not—indeed, they cannot—tell us what a rebuilt community will look like. Their book can only set the occasion for a residential community to establish conditions under which a process of discovery and innovation can take hold and evolve. That process, according to the authors, can generate more fluid rules that specify and draw support from the natural contingencies of effective teaching and learning. Using concepts now common in modern participatory-management practices (the text is nontechnical and easy to read), a framework for designing a self-governing culture is provided. The book details the processes of democratic decision making, consensus building, problem solving, and cooperative learning. It espouses an ecological and interbehavioral approach by encouraging the discovery of interacting factors in the residential system that affect the behavior of all community members.

Wetzel and Hoschouer emphasize the importance of the normal routine of daily living as the primary context in which learning occurs. Inventory-based skill assessment is replaced with an analysis of the person's capacity to contribute to that particular community. Objectives and strategies emerge *in vivo* as the person participates in the sequences that constitute the routines. Many of the planned teaching interactions are flexible, team-teaching arrangements. Standardized and planned response-specific prescriptions for instruction do not produce relevant repertoires for an individual whose behavior is under control of the natural social environment. Indeed, much of the teaching is incidental and unplanned; opportunities for learning coincide with the natural flow of events, like those in a family.

How are staff taught to recognize such

opportunities and guide appropriate social interactions? A tutorial process is described in which the reciprocal nature of teaching and learning is emphasized. The staff also learns that effective teaching contingencies require immediate adjustment because behavior-environment interactions are constantly changing (e.g., waiting for the next scheduled team meeting to sanction a program change is counterproductive). During the tutorial process, the staff learns to guide observations, model, coach, observe, and provide feedback. In this way, programs are developed, not installed as packages. The research and development occurs in the natural environment.

The format of the book, like the teaching it promotes, centers about the daily routines of living. Six dimensions of program development are discussed in separate chapters: designing routines and creating teaching opportunities, residential skill assessment, teaching goals, teaching strategies, staff training, and organization and roles. The appendices contain numerous assessment protocols, data recording forms, and training records that can be adapted to any residential environment.

A principal message of the book is that inappropriate behavior will decrease substantially as one becomes involved in positive, culturally appropriate routines. Increasingly longer sequences of adaptive behavior become trapped by the natural consequences of daily living. The authors caution that excessive concern with eliminating maladaptive behavior blurs the focus of constructing appropriate repertoires and invites a myriad of deceleration tactics.

Unfortunately, many potential adopters of the *Residential Teaching Communities* concept will resist the approach. Some proponents of the normalization movement may not adopt it because it views institutions as behaviors, not locations, and because it does not avoid the use of institutional terminology. Similarly, some behavior analysts will be skeptical because, as a molar intervention, its effects have not yet been reported

in the applied literature. Finally, as countercontrol against a hoax, the concept requires the cooperation of the controllers who support the institutional rules and practices. That would seem to be a formidable obstacle, but the controllers are

not intentionally perpetuating a hoax—they do not know what is happening.

REFERENCES

Skinner, B. F. (1971). *Beyond freedom and dignity*. New York: Knopf.